



U.S. Immigration
and Customs
Enforcement

News Release

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ICE nabs 24 Chinese attempting to illegally enter the United States

CULEBRA, Puerto Rico—Twenty-four Chinese nationals who tried to enter the United States illegally were apprehended earlier today by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) special agents near the vicinity of Culebra Island off the eastern coast of Puerto Rico.

The Chinese nationals were spotted at approximately 1:30 a.m. by a U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) patrol aircraft conducting a routine mission. The Chinese nationals were traveling aboard a 32-foot catamaran-type vessel.

The group included 13 females and 11 males and were accompanied by two French males who allegedly drove the vessel from St. Maarten, Netherlands Antilles to Puerto Rico.

ICE is investigating this human smuggling venture and does not rule out criminal charges against the alleged captains of the vessel.

“Those who think that the eastern coast of Puerto Rico is an easy gateway to illegally enter the U.S. should think it twice,” said Lydia St. John-Mellado, acting special agent-in-charge of ICE in Puerto Rico. “ICE, as well as our Department of Homeland Security partners, and the Puerto Rico Police Department are committed to preventing illegal migration to the United States through Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands.”

The 24 illegal aliens and the two French nationals are in ICE custody awaiting the outcome of their cases.

Disrupting and dismantling human smuggling and trafficking rings has been a top priority for ICE since the agency was established in March 2003, given the potential threat that these organizations pose both to national security and public safety. With ICE’s broad authorities for enforcing immigration and customs laws and its expertise in financial investigations, the agency is able to pursue human smuggling organizations more aggressively than ever before. As a result, ICE agents arrested more than 1,630 human smugglers nationwide in fiscal year 2004.

ICE

U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement was established in March 2003 as the largest investigative arm of the Department of Homeland Security. ICE is comprised of four integrated divisions that form a 21st century law enforcement agency with broad responsibilities for a number of key homeland security priorities.